BEYOND TRAINING: AN INTEGRATED TRANSFORMATIVE AND SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING FRAMEWORK FOR CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Tijo Thomas[1], Dr. Gowher Ahmad Naik[2]

[1]Research Scholar, English language Teaching, Lingaya's Vidyapeeth, Faridabad, Haryana, India, Email: chennitijo@gmail.com
[2]Associate professor, Department of English, Lingaya's Vidyapeeth, Faridabad, Haryana, India

Abstract:
The current state of Continuous Professional Development (CPD) in English Language Teaching (ELT) is under strain due to rapid digital change and growing linguistic diversity, which make traditional workshop-driven approaches less effective and often priorities compliance and certification over teacher agency. This paper presents the Transformative and Self-Directed CPD (TSD-CPD) Framework. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used. First, 380 English teachers from South India completed a survey; structural equation modeling analyzed the data. Then, 25 highly engaged teachers provided interviews and monthly reflective journals. Results show that transformative learning and self-directed readiness independently predict professional growth. Teacher agency partially mediates these links, while institutional support moderates them. The study integrates Mezirow's Transformative Learning with Knowles' Adult Learning for ELT. It calls on policymakers and institutional leaders to adopt flexible, self-directed CPD systems that nurture teacher autonomy and sustained development.
Keywords: Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Transformative Learning, Self-Directed Learning, English Language Teaching, Teacher Professional Growth, Adult Learning Theory, Professional Identity

1..INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a profession is in the process of rapid transformation globally, and none so extensively as in the developing countries like India. Teachers today are no longer engaged in traditional roles such as teaching grammar rules and literary knowledge. Modern teaching, in fact, can be seen as an intrinsically uncertain activity conducted under volatile conditions of high ambiguity and complexity influenced by a complex array of global factors. Technologies are constantly changing teaching methods in the classroom to blended and virtual ones. New large language models are only adding further ambiguity to this. To benefit optimally from all of the opportunities technology offers for their profession, teachers need to cater to the learners' preferences and needs. It has been observed that students these days prefer learner-centered and task-based, interactive approach to teaching and learning. Classrooms are also becoming multilingual, constantly interacting with indigenous dialects and English. This is where CPD is needed for the teachers to excel at their work, and the traditional idea of it being a supplemental tool for teachers, has ceased to exist; now CPD is an integral part of their profession. However, the official, institutional CPD for teachers is still failing to keep up with these global shifts. CPD courses created by state institutions and institutions in the secondary, upper secondary, and higher education, seem to serve mainly administrative purposes. These programs are often presented as central events where the teachers' attendance needs to be certified, a process that leads to receiving a paper-based certificate upon successful completion, and can be a requirement for teachers' promotion. Such a top-down structure may reinforce a passive role for the teachers, where they rely on trainers and experts, thus hindering their independent development and transformative change, leading to reduced teacher psychological well-being and less effectiveness in the classroom. The area remains underspecified as research literature is mostly concentrated on the pragmatic effects and the degree of satisfaction teachers express following participation in professional development events; the cognitive and affective elements of teacher transformation in language CPD, and

in general, has been minimally studied. Data regarding the relationships among the processes of transformative and self-directed learning within the language classroom are still lacking and the nature of the relationships between teachers' autonomy, critical thinking, external institutional pressures, and professional practice transformation have been left largely unexplored. Thus, the primary aim of this study is to contribute to this knowledge base and present an integrated theoretical model of the interplay between these phenomena entitled Transformative Self-Directed CPD (TSD-CPD), focusing on how transformative processes and self-directed learning helps in teachers' professional development and improvement of classroom teaching. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods research design will be employed for this study

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Emerging Paradigm of Teacher Professional Development in ELT

For decades, professional development (PD) within English Language Teaching (ELT) operated under a restrictive, top-down framework deeply rooted in behaviorism and technocracy. This traditional approach, which Foley (1998) famously terms the "deficit model," views practicing instructors not as autonomous educators, but as under-equipped technicians who require periodic, external injections of pedagogical expertise (Cope & Waters, 2009). The structural vehicle for this model has long been the "one-shot seminar"—fragmented, isolated workshops where an outside expert delivers pre-packaged formulas to a passive audience. Because these short-lived sessions strip pedagogical theory entirely away from the messy realities of the classroom, they have faced heavy criticism for failing to produce meaningful or lasting changes in actual instructional practices (Foley, 1998).

The catalyst for a genuine paradigm shift emerged during the late 1980s with Donn Schön's landmark conceptualization of the "reflective practitioner" (Schön, 1983). Schön challenged the technocratic status quo by arguing that meaningful professional growth springs from an educator's internal capacity for critical self-analysis rather than passive compliance with external mandates. Under this reflective umbrella, teacher development shifted inward, prioritizing concrete practices such as:

Maintaining teaching diaries and developmental journals to track pedagogical choices.

Conducting systematic, post-mortem analyses of specific lessons.

Engaging in localized action research to solve immediate classroom dilemmas.

Over time, the discourse surrounding reflectivity evolved. Researchers recognized that teacher reflection cannot happen in a vacuum; it is not merely a subjective, solitary journey, but a socially constructed act. Modern ELT PD thrives on collaboration. When teachers regularly gather to analyze institution-specific challenges, share authentic instructional materials, and engage in peer observations, they do more than just sharpen their technical skills—they actively construct a shared professional identity and ethical framework (Smit & van der Walt, 2009).

Yet, despite an overwhelming consensus among theorists regarding the value of dialogic, collaborative PD, a persistent disconnects remains. While academic literature champions active engagement, many educational institutions continue to rely on passive, transmissive delivery methods, leaving a substantial gap between progressive theory and institutional reality (Little, 1998).

2.2. Transformative Learning Theory and its Application to ELT

When exploring how teachers navigate deep, foundational shifts in their core beliefs, educational scholars frequently lean on Jack Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory. Mezirow distinguishes sharply between informational learning—which simply appends new data to a teacher's existing knowledge base—and transformative learning, which triggers a profound "perspective transformation." This process fundamentally alters how an adult interprets experiences and makes sense of the world (Mezirow, 1991).

According to Mezirow (1991, p. 58), this profound shift is ignited by a "disorienting dilemma"—an encounter or piece of information that fundamentally contradicts or destabilizes a person's taken-for-granted frameworks. Resolving such a crisis requires a demanding cognitive trajectory:

Engaging in intense, critically reflective self-analysis.

Objectively evaluating one's current knowledge boundaries.

Participating in open dialogue with peers to process the shift.

Testing alternative interpretive schemes in real-world scenarios.

This eventually culminates in a revised frame of reference that redefines subsequent actions (Mezirow, 2000).

[Disorienting Dilemma] ➔ [Critical Reflection & Dialogue] ➔ [Perspective Transformation] ➔ [New Pedagogical Action]

In the realm of ELT, this theory offers a powerful lens for understanding the psychological friction involved in pedagogical reform. Consider a veteran instructor whose entire career has been anchored in the rigid structures of the Grammar-Translation Method. If that instructor is suddenly dropped into a modern, communicative language center or tasked with teaching a highly heterogeneous, multi-ethnic student body, they face a classic disorienting dilemma. Attending a generic weekend lecture on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) will do nothing to ease this tension. Instead, the instructor must endure a painful process of unlearning, self-criticism, and cognitive rebuilding (Burns, 2009). The resulting transformation alters not just their daily lesson plans, but their very identity within the profession.

2.3. Self-Directed Learning Theory in Contemporary Education

Complementing the reflective and transformative frameworks is Self-Directed Learning (SDL) Theory, which draws its conceptual strength from Malcolm Knowles' (1980) foundational work on andragogy—the distinct art and science of facilitating adult learning. Knowles posits that adult maturity brings a natural psychological shift away from the dependency characteristic of childhood toward increasing autonomy. In an educational context, this means adult learners are uniquely capable of taking psychological ownership of their own development—diagnosing their learning needs, articulating goals, identifying human and material resources, choosing appropriate strategies, and critically evaluating their own outcomes.

Consequently, an effective self-directed teacher cannot function as a passive consumer of a pre-determined curriculum. SDL demands an active, highly agentic posture. This self-starting capability has become an absolute necessity in today's volatile educational landscape, where rapid demographic shifts and relentless technological advancements quickly render static skillsets obsolete. Passively waiting for institutional directives or relying on sporadic, top-down workshops is no longer a viable professional survival strategy.

In this fast-paced environment, the language professionals who remain competitive are those who are highly autonomous. These are the educators who proactively identify their own gaps—such as admitting a need for better digital literacy—and independently seek out solutions, whether by enrolling in online courses, joining global digital teaching communities, or piloting innovative techniques in their classrooms.

2.4. The Intersection of Professional Identity and Teacher Agency

At the heart of contemporary educational discourse lies the tight, reciprocal relationship between teacher identity and teacher agency. Professional identity is not a static title; it is an ongoing, dynamic process of self-negotiation within a socially complex and shifting institutional landscape (Reid, 2005). It encompasses how teachers view their roles, handle systemic reforms, and position themselves within the broader academic community. Teacher agency, on the other hand, is the operational arm of that identity—the developed capacity of educators to make purposeful choices, take decisive action, and exert meaningful control over their professional work.

While the foundation of professional identity must be laid as an individual enters the field, genuine agency emerges over time through a fluid interplay between personal traits and the surrounding ecological environment (Reid, 2005). When teachers cultivate high levels of self-efficacy and commit to rigorous reflective practices, they naturally gain greater autonomy. They step away from the passive role of curriculum consumers and transform into active designers who shape coursework, advocate for students, and lead institutional change. Crucially, the development of this agency does not happen in isolation; it requires an independent yet deeply collaborative professional learning community where teachers feel empowered to act both individually and collectively.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Integrated Transformative Self-Directed CPD (TSD-CPD) Framework includes the fundamental ideas of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (1991, 2000) and Knowles' Self-Directed Learning Theory (1980). Diametrically opposite to the traditional CPD approach, divides critical reflection and behavioral changes of the learners. The TSD-CPD Framework claims that an authentic professional

transformation results from the operation of internal transformation processes and self-direction.

Below in Table 1 are presented the structural dimensions of this model.

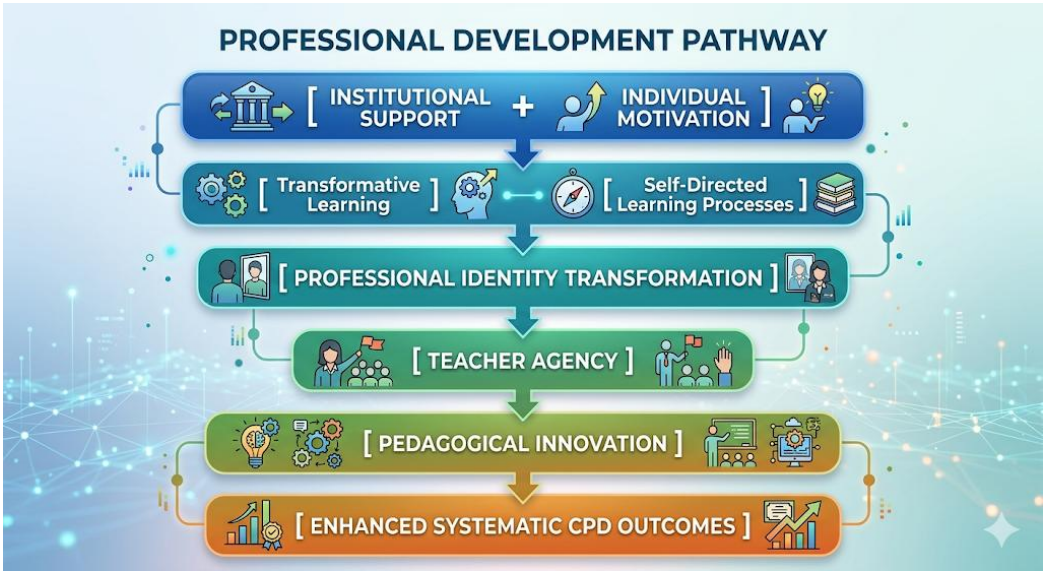
Table 1: Here is the formatted table mapping the structural dimensions of the Integrated TSD-CPD Framework based on the available input:

Model Component	Core Operational Variables	Primary Theoretical Alignments
Input Variables	Individual motivation, teaching experience, digital competence, baseline learning orientation; Institutional policies, resource availability, organizational learning culture	Andragogical Antecedents & Institutional Systems Theory
Transformative Processes	Experiencing classroom disorienting dilemmas, engaging in critical reflective processes, participating in peer transformative discussions, reframing professional perspectives	Mezirow's Perspective Transformation Theory (Mezirow, 1991, 2000)
Self-Directed Processes	Autonomous teacher self-assessment, independent goal-setting, resource searching, reflective journal writing, self-evaluating classroom practice	Knowles' Self-Directed Learning (SDL) Framework (Knowles, 1980)
Growth Outcomes	Innovations in classroom instruction, strengthened teacher agency, reconstruction of professional identity, increased classroom effectiveness, lifelong learning disposition	Emergent Teacher Agency & Critical Pedagogy Models

The input variables consist of personal factors such as motivation, years of experience, digital readiness, and learning attitude, as well as organizational factors like support from policies, resources, and the learning environment. These are conditions that become the pre-requisites for two types of processes, which include Transformative Learning Processes and Self-Directed Learning Processes. These two types of processes interact in such a way that outputs produced by self-directed learning processes can become the stimulus for reflective process, thus initiating a transformative learning process. As a result, five essential traits emerge, which include pedagogical innovation, increased teacher autonomy, transformation of professional identity, classroom effectiveness, and tendency towards life-long learning.

4. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

A dynamic system of relationships inherent to the TSD-CPD Model is illustrated below. The following schematic shows the sequence of events in terms of the transition from inputs to outcomes:



5. METHODOLOGY

5.1. Research Design

Explanatory sequential mixed methods were adopted in the current study. To begin with, quantitative data was collected and analyzed to determine general relationships. Then, qualitative data was collected to interpret the results gained through the numerical analysis.

5.2. Participants and Context

The quantitative sample included 380 teachers of English at diverse institutions across South India, selected by stratified random sampling. As for the qualitative portion, 25 teachers from the original sample participated in the study based on their involvement in the quantitative survey.

5.3. Instruments

For the quantitative analysis, four existing 5-point Likert scales were used:

- Transformative Learning Scale (King, 2005; Cronbach's alpha, $\alpha = 0.86$)
- Self-Directed Learning Readiness Scale (SDLRS) (Guglielmino, 1977; $\alpha = 0.89$)
- Teacher Agency Scale ($\alpha = 0.84$)
- CPD Effectiveness Scale ($\alpha = 0.87$)

Qualitative data were collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews and open focus groups. Moreover, teachers who took part in the experiment were asked to keep structured journals once a month throughout the academic year.

6. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

6.1. Quantitative Analysis and SEM

After the initial descriptive analysis, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were conducted. It turned out that the model had acceptable goodness of fit indices: $\chi 2/df = 2.14$, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.048, SRMR = 0.042.

The following are hypothesized relationships and estimated parameters of the structural model:

Hypothesized Path | Beta (β) | t-Value | p-Value | Result

Transformative Learning → Professional Growth (H1) | 0.42 | 5.89 | <0.001 | Supported

Self-Directed Learning → Professional Growth (H2) | 0.48 | 6.42 | <0.001 | Supported

Transformative Learning → Teacher Agency | 0.54 | 7.11 | <0.001 | Supported

Self-Directed Learning → Teacher Agency | 0.61 | 8.34 | <0.001 | Supported

Teacher Agency → Professional Growth (Med. H3/H4) | 0.36 | 4.92 | <0.001 | Supported

Institutional Support × Learning Processes (H5) | 0.22 | 3.15 | <0.01 | Supported

Thus, we can conclude that both transformative learning ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.001$) and self-directed learning ($\beta = 0.48$, $p < 0.001$) contribute to professional growth. Hypotheses 3 and 4 are supported, and teacher agency acts as a mediating variable between the proposed types of learning processes and career success. Hypothesis 5 also turns out to be true, with institutional support playing a moderating role in this context.

6.2. Qualitative Thematic Analysis

The content of interviews and journals were analyzed and divided into four main themes:

Theme 1: The Spark of Disorienting Dilemmas. Teachers experienced considerable difficulties in the classroom, which helped them make changes. Some of these events were associated with stressful experiences related to the shift to online classes and the lack of motivation to follow traditional practices. Theme 2: An Autonomy-Driven Growth Journey. Autonomous teachers take matters into their own hands by keeping journals, observing each other, communicating in online forums of language educators, and concentrating on effective classroom practices rather than managerial routines. Theme 3: Shifting Professional Identities. Teachers change the way they perceive their profession and themselves, moving from an overly focused view of the need for grammar skills towards a more holistic perception of language educators as facilitators of critical thinking in students. Theme 4: Structural Hurdles and Open Doors. Inflexible curricula, numerous administrative assignments, and ineffective leadership may hamper teachers' efforts, while the presence of flexible schedules, research support, and cooperation can promote professional success.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS

The results clearly prove the validity of the proposed model, as contemporary classroom problems cannot be solved by means of traditional approaches. Instead, professional growth depends on the teachers' ability to conduct self-reflection and engage in autonomous development. In particular, the concept of teacher agency is critical here, combined with institutional support, and calls for flexible approaches to professional development.

8. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

By bringing together Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory and Knowles' Adult Learning Theory, the study contributes to the theoretical development of the area under investigation. The proposed TSD-CPD Model goes beyond the mere acquisition of practical skills.

9. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Educational institutions need to move away from inflexible professional development strategies and create a flexible atmosphere that allows enough time and resources for conducting research and cooperating.The policies concerning teachers' professional development should include measures that would motivate them to develop through action research and peer communication.ELT practitioners should become responsible for their professional path and regularly record their impressions in journals, communicate with colleagues, and maintain contacts within the international community of language teachers.

10. CONCLUSION

It becomes obvious that traditional methods of professional development cannot help teachers reach desired goals in today's complex environment. To achieve real growth, teachers should obtain more independence and have opportunities to improve the quality of their work. Thus, the suggested TSD-CPD Framework can prove to be very helpful.

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